New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

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1949 PRODUCTIONS

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New York

Theatre Critics' Reviews

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A Valuable and Authoritative Record of

the Contemporary Theatre

Cast Index

Listed alphabetically are the names of actors and actresses in shows opening during the year 1949. The number opposite the name indicates the pages on which each is found in NEW YORK THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS. We regret that we cannot include the various cast changes, but can only give the opening night casts as published in the New York newspapers.

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"How Long Till Summer"

Journal-American

DECEMBER 28, 1949

It's Neither Epistle Nor Entertainment

By ROBERT GARLAND

All evening, at The Playhouse, a message tries to get through. But, being a thick coriaceous drama, "How Long Till Summer" blocks it. Thereby its playwrights, Sarett and Herbert Rudley, are doubly defeated. For they deliver neither an epistle nor an entertainment!

Even before the curtain rose on last night's premiere, defeat was indicated. At first, the assembling congregation was halted in the theatre's outer lobby. Then, when the doors were opened and the audience admitted, we waited interminably while nothing happened.

Men who could have been Leon J. Bronesky and Edward M. Gilbert, the co-producers, passed from auditorium to stage, from stage to auditorium. Out front, rumor raised its unpropitious head. No, there would not be a show. Yes, there would be a show. No, there would not—

At long, long last, "How Long Till Summer" finally got under way.

• • •

A Super-Legree

"How Long Till Summer" gets under way against an alley wall. There, two small boys are playing. A white boy, Johnny Burns. A colored boy, Josh Jeffers. They like each other well enough until the white boy's father comes along to call the colored boy names.

Drunk, dirty, disorderly, imbibing from a bottle, Mr. Burns is no credit to his race, his color or his creed. You know him from the books you read, the movies you see. Only at The Playhouse, Johnny Burns, senior, makes Simon Legree look like Little Eva.

Because he does, "How Long Till Summer" diverts its message by becoming unreal and nightmarish instead of real and awake. Facts mix with fantasy. Real betting, numbers and marijuana on the left side of the stage. Unreal caging, lynching and spitting-upon on the right.

Each side promptly nullifies the other. And for good and all!

• • •

'John' Excels

Of the several players at The Playhouse, only Josh White, junior—he is John White, in the program—manages to see his way clearly among the tragedy-versus-fantasy Sarett and Herbert Rudley have substituted for a drama. Master White should, by rights, be starred!

The others do as well as can be expected. And that's not very well. Ida James, as young Josh White's on-stage mother, is an actress I would like to see again. And, as a kindly Negro doctor, Frank Wilson is himself once more. Peter Capell is, indeed, a caution as A Man.

Ralph Alswang, who knows his way about a scene shop, has designed a "Voice of the Turtle" setting that serves its purpose well. Especially when, on the unreal side, Sam Gilman, as Mr. Burns, is sicking the hounds of race-hatred on the colored playmate of his uncolored son . . .

I wish that Eleanor Roosevelt, who publicly appreciates "How Long Till Summer," had written my review!

"HOW LONG TILL SUMMER"

Play by Sarett and Herbert Rudley; staged by Mr. Rudley; settings and lighting by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Enid Smiley; presented by Leon J. Bronesky and Edward M. Gilbert at the Playhouse Theatre, December 27, 1949. The cast:

Johnny Burns...Charles Taylor
Josh Jeffers....John White, Jr.
Mr. Burns.....Sam Gilman
Kate Jeffers.....Ida James
Mary.....Evelyn Davis
Harold Carver..Milton Williams
Al Gaige.....Leigh Whipper
Mathew Jeffers.....Josh White
Dr. Dan Benson...Frank Wilson
Mrs. Dexter..Fredi Washington
Fred Johnson..Arthur O'Connell
Harlan.....Maxwell Glanville
A Man.....Peter Capell

Synopsis: An alley wall. The Jeffers' apartment and several places real only in Josh Jeffers' imagination. Act I: Later afternoon—Spring, 1948. Act II: Two hours later.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

DECEMBER 28, 1949

A Well-Intentioned Catastrophe

By Richard Watts Jr.

Good intentions and the germ of an interesting idea are frantically wasted on the season's most hopeless playwriting in "How Long Till Summer," which had an unhappy opening at the Playhouse last night. Sarett and Herbert Rudley, its authors, have attempted a potentially striking approach to the drama of anti-Negro prejudice, but their efforts are so pathetically bogged down in confusion and ineptness that the result, despite the presence of some engaging actors, is a most dismal evening in the theatre.

It was the purpose of the dramatists to show the horror of race prejudice through the eyes of a little Negro boy who had played happily with his white companions without any thought of a barrier between them, until the day when the worthless, drunken father of his closest friend called him ugly names and told his son never to speak to him again. Shocked and puzzled by the crash of his pleasant world about him, the Negro child began to dream nightmare fantasies in which he was insulted and punished for his black skin.

Possibilities

There is a touch of imagination in one of the nightmare episodes, and, if the play had concentrated on this fresh aspect of its theme, an effective and original drama might have resulted, particularly since the bewildered child is charmingly played by Josh White Jr., talented son of the popular singer of folk songs. The Rudleys also reveal momentary signs of an ability to write scenes of quiet domestic life, and the early account of the home of the boy's family before tragedy descends upon it gives promise of good things to come.

Instead, however, of keeping to matters which they seem to know something about and which have a trace of freshness in them, the playwrights go off into some terrible melodrama about the Negro father's entanglement with an unsavory racketeer, who plans to run him for Congress. It is all so inept and confusing, and it gets so clumsily in the way of the central theme, that all the promise evaporates in some dull and extremely embarrassing chaos.

The Henchman

In their melodramatic episodes, the Rudleys are obviously trying to show how the father, who was determined to find a place for his family in a white man's world at any cost, lost all his sense of values amid the cruelty of his struggle for survival against unfair odds. But they are almost incredibly inexpert about it. Toward the end, they attempt to revive interest by introducing a picturesque henchman of the racketeer. He presumably represents suspense, but the fellow proceeds to talk so much that he becomes merely an added bore.

In addition to young Josh White's winning performance, there is a simple and attractive portrayal of the boy's mother by Ida James, while those excellent actors, Frank Wilson and Leigh Whipper, make an idealistic doctor and a melancholy publisher believeable figures. But Josh White Sr. moves confusingly back and forth between heroism and villainy as the child's father, Fredi Washington has nothing to do, and Peter Capell, the racketeer's henchman, is lost in a morass of talk. "How Long Till Summer" is, in short, a mess.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 28, 1949

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

Six Months

SARETT and Herbert Rudley's "How Long Till Summer" is a lurid representation of an emotional and moral problem in a Negro family. Under Mr. Rudley's own direction, the new arrival at the Playhouse sets forth on a split stage a father wrestling with his conscience in a dirty deal while his young son writhes with bewilderment and fear after his first contact with prejudice. It is an interesting dramatic idea containing many hard knots of conflict, an idea with enough latent force to be underwritten and underplayed. In this production by Leon J. Bronesky and Edward M. Gilbert, it is overwritten, overplayed and unevenly acted into a show that makes a loud noise without a resulting impact.

The play is a gradual rapprochement of two dramas that entwine in the final scene. In the living room is a father played by Josh White, trying to build a wall of money around his family by conniving with crooks in a Congressional election. In the bedroom on the other side of the Ralph Alswang setting is a very young and very appealing child, played by Josh White jr., whose defenses have already been breached in an unpleasant alley incident and whose nightmares are savage images of despair. Unfortunately the staging is so full of busy devices, sudden awkward placements of characters and the shouting of empty lines to give them emphasis that it is hard to see the point through the diversion. The problem and its conclusion are sound enough, but the execution is enough to stagger a much steadier piece of work.

* * *

The writing of "How Long Till Summer?" is sprinkled with voids, uncertainties and time-marking lines, and it employs what has come to be one of this corner's pet character aversions: the righteous sweetheart, or wife, who wrings her hands and tries to argue her man out of Doing the Wrong Thing. She has been the keystone of too many bad problem plays, and in this one, as played by Ida James, she is a most inadequate conscience. Indeed, all of the characters are shallow except for the children and the ones who become noticed by displaying curious eccentricities. The basic idea has no real dramatic covering as it marches across the stage at the Playhouse in a patchwork quilt of strong language, tricky mechanical devices and extravagant gestures.

With few exceptions, the acting ranges from colorless to faulty. Josh White jr. has a hard role for one so young, but he manages to accumulate pity without going over the line of sentiment. Charles Taylor is natural enough as a white boy in the alley scene, and Frank Wilson knows what he is about as a doctor who can't stand the smell of rotten politics. Decidedly, Sarett and Herbert Rudley have drafted an interesting plan for a play in "How Long Till Summer." But in the lines and in the flesh it creates only a mirage of conspicuous confusion.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 28, 1949

Racial Issue Play Stars Josh White

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The new offering at the Playhouse, called "How Long Till Summer" is every bit as well intentioned as it is misguided, or perhaps derailed, in the course of its production.

There is an uncomfortable mixture of themes here in the story of a tiny Negro boy trying to adjust himself to the cruelties of race prejudice while his father hopes, by taking part in political shenanigans, to spare his son such bitter experiences.

Structurally, as well as thematically, the play is divers. The father's experience is told in most literal, often melodramatic, terms. The child's story begins in overt drama, then progresses in awkward and superimposed dream fantasies that are too baldly performed to meld, or even agreeably contrast, with the more actual narrative.

Real Estate Swindle.

It is only in the final scene that the two story lines blend. The father, a lawyer, is pressed by his wife and his best friend, an older doctor, to admit his part in an ugly real estate swindle that has ended in a fire which killed several people. If the man does this he will clear his own conscience at the price of his potential political career.

When his son, in a terrifying nightmare, shows how basic and permanent his fear of prejudice is by screaming that he will claw off his dark skin, the father sees that he has proved nothing in his underhanded deals. As the curtain falls he is presumably about to tell the truth to a newspaper editor.

The play has no really inspirational writing in it and it is played at a strangely tedious tempo, which makes it seem much longer than the bare two hours it really lasts.

Similarly the acting is very down to earth, inclined too frequently to be for surface effect rather than to convey any deeply felt emotion.

Josh White, so well known as a balladier in clubs and on records, has a certain amount of vigor and presence as the father, but it is not a truly imaginative or stirring performance. His son, in real life and in the play, has some shocking moments in the dream sequences when he thinks he is put behind bars in a zoo, or is a heroic fire chief.

Family Friend Is Fine.

Ida James is attractive in the obvious, rather than interesting, role of the wife. Of the rest, Frank Wilson gives the most honest and convincing performance, as the family friend, a doctor.

This play was clearly intended to make a point for common honesty, and another against racial prejudice. Its moral argument is transparent. Its dealing with the racial question is too lopsided to signify anything. The only white characters to apear are a drunken bum and a slimy gangster, if one discounts a child too young to even think of sides, much less take them.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 28, 1949

'How Long Till Summer' Tedious

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"How Long Till Summer," which made its bow last evening at the Playhouse, is a muddled and tediously planned affair which never makes up its mind which of two plays it could be. The best feature of it is a well sustained performance by Josh White Jr., a grand little boy with a lot of drive and talent.

One part of the drama—the part which he played on the left of Ralph Alswang's nicely-set stage, concerns a successful Negro lawyer who is running for Congress. He is supposed to be on the side of righteousness, but his wife discovers, to what would have been revealed as her shock and disgust by a better actress, that he is the bought stooge of a mobster.

A Dream Play.

The other part of "How Long Till Summer" tells of the candidate's small son, who has a white boy as an alley playmate until the white boy's drunken father stops the friendship. This intoxicated bigot calls the Negro lad a black bastard and threatens leeringly to hang him or tear his black skin right off him.

The boy is so frightened that he goes home to bed and has a number of nightmares—much more grotesque and malevolent nightmares than Christopher Blake had in Moss Hart's "Christopher Blake." In fact, the dreams are so bad that he goes out of his mind and dies.

Some Good Bits.

I never did get interested in the political side of the stage, even though it did have a good, evil performance by Peter Capell as a gangster and some interesting if brief characterizations by Leigh Whipper and Frank Wilson. I think this part of the drama was supposed to be "State of the Union," but "State of the Union" was better, clearer and funnier.

Josh White Jr.'s father plays the Congressional candidate, and members of the company include Fredi Washington, Charles Taylor (who is excellent as the little white boy), Sam Gilman and Ida James. The authors are Sarett and Herbert Rudley. The direction, by Mr. Rudley, is awkward and sluggish.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 28, 1949

'How Long Till Summer' a Problem Play About Racial Neuroses With Josh White in Chief Part

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although the theme is vital, the play does not poke beneath the surface. The theme is the life of the Negro in a white world. The play is "How Long Till Summer," which opened at the Playhouse last evening. Sarett and Herbert Rudley, authors, have tried to analyze color neuroses in a conventional problem drama about corrupt politics.

* * *

They are more successful with their young characters than their adults. On one side of the stage is a Negro boy who has discovered the color problem the hard way. He has been brutally frightened by the bullying father of his white chum. Unable to understand why he is hated so viciously, the Negro boy is tortured with savage nightmares that represent the terrors of the race.

On the other side of the stage, Mr. and Mrs. Rudley tell a hackneyed and diffuse story about a Negro lawyer who is running for Congress. Eager to escape racial barriers, he is secretly accepting the backing of a white gangster who exploits the Negro race. The candidate for Congress is father of the terrified boy on the opposite side of the stage, and the two stories are supposed to complement each other. But the connection is more abstract than dramatic, for it is difficult to see.

* * *

And since the political story is studded with clichés, it is much less interesting than the emotional fantasies of the boy. He is obviously going through a painful ordeal. It would be a simple act of mercy if Mr. and Mrs. Rudley forgot their stereotyped adults and gave their full attention to him. That would also make a finer play.

Acting as his own director, Mr. Rudley has not noticeably befriended his play. Despite the obvious merits of the actors, the performance is mechanical and uneasy. As the candidate for Congress, Josh White, the happy troubadour, gives a competent performance that is several cuts below the level of his singing career. Frank Wilson plays the part of a fatherly doctor with warm and winning simplicity worthy of a better play.

* * *

Among the other good actors are Ida James, Fredi Washington, Evelyn Davis, Leigh Whipper, Sam Gilman and Peter Capell. But this column would rather plump for John White Jr. and Charles Taylor, who play the parts of a Negro boy and a white boy, respectively. Both of them are frank, artless and attractive. Any time a playwright wants to devote a whole drama to them, this column will guarantee every consideration that is ethically possible. Fortunately, these two lads have not been corrupted by experience yet.

The Sun

DECEMBER 28, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

The Worst Thus Far.

"How Long Till Summer," a play of racial strife and racial conflict, written by Sarett and Herbert Rudley and presented last evening at the Playhouse, turns out to be a hysterical and jumbled drama. All that I could find in its favor was its brevity. The proceedings began at 8:45 and by 10:35 class was dismissed.

There is a lot of intensity in the acting from a cast of colored and white players, but the scenes are lacking in theatrical effectiveness and there is no writing to support all the vehemence. Here's a problem play that goes its way drearily through two acts without creating any interest whatever in its issues or in its characters.

The Rudleys are writing about a money-minded Negro lawyer who is seeking a place in Congress and who is involved with a corrupt machine. He ignores the pleas of his wife—she wants him to break with the politicians and give up the race—but he is somehow brought to his senses when his young son is awakened by a wild nightmare. "How Long Till Summer" goes back and forth into dream sequences, and they're pretty terrible.

Josh White, starred in the play, acts the principal role with vigor, at least. Frank Wilson, always a good actor, brings something of a characterization to the part of the doctor who has a conscience. Ida James plays the agonized wife trying to save her lawyer-husband from the evil gang and John White Jr. does what he can with the role of the lawyer's son taunted by the whites and given to dreams about being hanged.

"How Long Till Summer" is a weird and rambling drama which does not advance the cause of the colored race and gives no service to the theater. The employment that it offers to thirteen players will be temporary. Ralph Alswang's elaborate setting will quickly find a place in somebody's overcrowded storehouse.

Put down "How Long Till Summer" as the season's worst—to date.

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 28, 1949

'How Long Till Summer' Sincere But Confused

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"How Long Till Summer" is a sincere but confused play from the combined pens of Sarett and Herbert Rudley. It is marked by good intentions that are not often realized. Paradoxically, one of its virtues and defects is brevity.

The Rudleys present the case of Mathew Jeffers, gifted Negro lawyer, who consents to run for Congress with the backing of a political gangster. Jeffers believes this will give him money, power and protection for his young son, Josh, against racial discrimination.

His wife and a Negro doctor of genuine integrity finally persuade Jeffers that his course will betray and not help either the son or the cause of his people. So Jeffers withdraws from the race, even though he and the doctor expect physical harm from the racket boss.

The script is sketchily written and doesn't probe its problem as deeply as it should. It ought to be vastly moving, but it seldom is. It is pitched in script and direction, by Herbert Rudley, to melodrama rather than effective drama.

Producers Leon J. Bronesky and Edward M. Gilbert have given the new arrival at the Playhouse the benefits of an atmospheric Ralph Alswang setting and a competent cast.

Concert singer Josh White proves that he is an accomplished actor in the role of Jeffers. Other first-raters in the company are Frank Wilson, Leigh Whipper, Ida James, Fredi Washington, Evelyn Davis and Milton Williams.

The younger generation is ably represented by Josh White, Jr. and Charles Taylor, pals, by the way, at the Professional Children's School.

Peter Capell contributes an interesting portrait of an oily thug with a bent for histrionics.

Though "How Long Till Summer" is an earnest play, we do not think it a successful one. It aims well, but somehow manages to miss the target. In fact, we were a little baffled as to just what the target really was at times.

"The Velvet Glove"

The Sun

DECEMBER 27, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Miss George Brilliant in Frail Comedy.

Some thirty-odd years ago Grace George gave employment and encouragement to a young beginner in the New York theater named Guthrie McClintic, who has come along with the passing seasons. It is now his pleasure to bring about her return to the stage in a new play—"The Velvet Glove," a sparse, skimpy but pleasant comedy, in which she again reveals herself as an actress of extraordinary finesse. The first performance was given last night at the Booth.

Rosemary Casey wrote "The Velvet Glove." It is crowded with detail, undoubtedly authentic, of the operation of the mother-general's office in a convent in upstate New York. An undernourished little play, it tells its story of the strategy used in getting a stubborn Bishop to change his mind about firing an able and idealistic young professor of history who has been suspected of Communism and charged with having an unsettling effect upon his students.

Very slight and very light, this "Velvet Glove," a one-situation comedy that is played by an excellent company, that has been directed with unerring precision by Guthrie McClintic and that renders a genuine service in getting Grace George back into the theater. This distinguished actress of the American drama for half a century brings her lovely voice, her vast technical skill, her exactness of timing and her mastery of the art of acting to her playing as the mother superior, a witty and all-wise woman who keeps the young professor in his job and prevents the good bishop from making an error in judgment. Miss George's performance is one of dignity, humor and poise. Of course, she deserves a better play than "The Velvet Glove." But nobody seems to have written one, so let's not be churlish. Rosemary Casey's trivial comedy is better than no comedy at all.

Walter Hampden, co-starred with Miss George, is delightful as a tolerant and chuckling Monsignor, a churchman with a sly charm, a thick brogue and a lively sense of humor—and of fair play. He throws his support to the cause of Mother Hildebrand and the outspoken Sister Monica, sharply played by that unfailing comedienne, Jean Dixon.

John Williams is first-rate as the Bishop who reverses his decision; Barbara Brady, granddaughter of Miss George and William A. Brady, is attractive as the mother superior's secretary. James Noble is quite good enough as the professor in trouble. Ben Lackland has a professional casualness as the newspaper man who happened to be about, and Naomi Riordan, playing the gracious Sister Lucy, is decidedly impressive in her Broadway debut. Donald Oenslager interior for an office in the Convent of St. Paul is neat and simple and presumably correct in all its detail.

"The Velvet Glove" is a frail and leisurely comedy that provides Grace George with a good part. Students of acting who turn up at the Booth during nights to come will see a genuine artist at work.

"THE VELVET GLOVE"

Play by Rosemary Casey; staged by Guthrie McClintic; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented by Mr. McClintic at the Booth Theatre, December 26, 1949. The cast:

Mary Renshaw . . Barbara Brady
Mother Hildebrand . . . . . Grace George
Sister Athanasius . . Muriel Starr
Sister Lucy . . . . . Naomi Riordan
Mr. Barton . . . . . Ben Lackland
Prof. Pearson . . . . James Noble
Sister Monica . . . . . Jean Dixon
Bishop Gregor . . . John Williams
Father Benton . . . . . Will Davis
Monsignor Burke . . . . . Walter Hampden

Synopsis: Scene—Mother Hildebrand's office in the Convent of St. Paul, in a city in northern New York. Act I: A Wednesday morning in February of the present year. Act II: Friday afternoon. Act III: Late Monday afternoon.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

DECEMBER 27, 1949

A Quiet Comedy of Convent Life

By Richard Watts Jr.

The deft and delightful playing of Grace George is always a pleasure to watch, and it is the chief virtue of "The Velvet Glove" that it supplies her with a nourishing role. The comedy by Rosemary Casey, which opened at the Booth Theatre last night, is an amiable but mild and rather attenuated little narrative, marked by quiet charm and modest superficiality, but Miss George's performance as a wise and understanding Mother Superior, engaged in the gentle vanquishment of a stern Bishop, gives it some much-needed vitality.

There is no disputing the pleasant warmth that has gone into this fond look at life and politics in the Catholic Convent of St. Paul, which is located in a city in Northern New York, thus permitting one of the nuns to make a small joke about Governor Dewey. Engaging as the placidity and gentleness of "The Velvet Glove" are, however, it would be in grave danger of disappearing into thin air if it were not for the invigorating work of Miss George, heroically aided by the unfailing Jean Dixon and some other excellent performers.

Convent Story

Under Guthrie McClintic's smooth direction, these likeable actors tell about the trial that came to the good nuns of St. Paul, when a young man teaching history to the girls in the convent school is accused of Communism for some modestly liberal remarks and is about to be dismissed by the harsh Bishop. Happily, the nuns and a kindly old Monsignor rally around the innocent youth, and the Mother Superior, who trusts in God but has her own stratagems, concocts an innocent plot to persuade the Bishop to reverse himself.

"The Velvet Glove" won the first prize in a play contest held by the Catholic organization known as the Christophers, and its picture of the pleasures and sorrows of the life spiritual is understandingly sympathetic, if upon occasion slightly arch. But, despite that sympathy, it does surprisingly emphasize mercenary matters just a bit. The history teacher is about to be fired because a rich contributor to the Church objects to his liberal views, and is finally reinstated because some wealthy ladies refuse even larger donations unless the young man is taken back. It seemed perhaps a trifle Marxian.

The Players

What keeps the play going is its characterizations, and these are of less interest through any ingenuity in the writing than because of the fine performances. Miss George is warm, humorous, wise and gentle as the Mother Superior. Miss Dixon is her wonderful sardonic self as a somewhat hot-tempered nun. Walter Hampden brings mellowness to the part of the sympathetic Monsignor, and John Williams is properly austere as the disapproving Bishop. There is a charming portrayal of a young nun, worried because she hasn't suffered, by the attractive Naomi Riordan.

The three non-clerical characters in the play are also well acted. Ben Lackland as a Presbyterian publisher has little to do, but James Noble is believable and likeable as the history teacher, and Barbara Brady, who has the good fortune to look like her mother, Katherine Alexander, plays the Mother Superior's secretary attractively. Their slightly embattled romance, though, is among the less interesting features of the evening. "The Velvet Glove" is a friendly and restful comedy that is filled chiefly with good will, but its one positive virtue is that it brings the welcome Grace George and Jean Dixon back to us.

Journal American

DECEMBER 27, 1949

A Pleasant Comedy, One of the Best in '49

By ROBERT GARLAND

Because of the lightness and warmth of Guthrie McClintic's presentation of The Christophers' prize-winning "The Velvet Glove," what could have been no more than a pleasant piece of on-stage proselytism is also among the season's most endearing non-musicals.

Composed with easy-going ethics by Rosemary Casey, much of the endearment at the Booth stems from Grace George and Walter Hampden in the piece's leading roles, from Jean Dixon looking lovely as a nun and from Miss George's granddaughter, Barbara Brady, in her debut.

Under the title of "Mother Hildebrand," this is the comedy that won a prize for being "most likely to promote Christian ideals in American living." The title, I fancy, became "The Velvet Glove" after Mr. Hampden was wisely chosen to share stellar honors with Miss George.

As to its likelihood of promoting Christian ideals in American living, I cannot be quoted. But to me, a Protestant, it is heartening to be shown that a Bishop can be as fallible as a Mother Superior can be human. And a Sister, a Monsignor and a churchly comedy on Broadway.

* * *

Prof Gets Smeared

Basically, Rosemary Casey's is the story of a young professor of modern history in a Catholic school for girls. He, in an irresponsible news story printed in a local paper, is smeared with the red of Communism. Professor Pearson is a liberal, simply that and nothing more.

The Bishop would be the villain, if by any chance, there were a villain and a Bishop could possibly be villainous. In the face of such impossibilities, Bishop Gregory is merely reactionary in his actions and not unstubborn in his mind. "Conservative" is, perhaps, his word!

So, at the Booth, there is a sort of holy war between the forces of liberalism, with Mother Hildebrand at their head, and the forces of conservatism, of which Bishop Gregory is the entire man power. He is not to be belittled, although he is vanquished at the end.

He is vanquished by a curious combination of a woman's common sense, electric angelus ringers, morning and evening prayers, and the bank in which the convent has a million dollars. Our side wins, with Professor Pearson and Mother Hildebrand's secretary on the verge of wedlock.

* * *

Grace Is a Joy

As the Mother Hildebrand who used to claim the title, Grace George is, in every way, a joy. It is she who brings beauty and belief to a character which might well be unbeautiful and unbelievable without her. Against her, the backward Bishop never has a chance.

Jean Dixon is captivating as Sister Monica, head of the convent school and a most outspoken nun. And beautiful in her handsome habit from Helene Pons. Granddaughter Barbara Brady carries on the family tradition as Mary Renshaw, Mother Hildebrand's love-lorn secretary.

Before turning to the men, I must pause for words of enthusiasm for Naomi Riordan, making her Broadway bow as Sister Lucy. A lovely young lady, Miss Riordan, who can act. So can James Noble, who is charming as the put-upon Professor Pearson.

Walter Hampden is a delight as the open-minded and arthritic Monsignor Burke. John Williams is a very Angelican Bishop Gregory, which could account for his money-mindedness ... These, the others, and Guthrie McClintic's omnipresent handiwork, mean everything to Rosemary Casey's play.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 27, 1949

Grace George Returns, Lovelier Than Ever, in 'The Velvet Glove'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

One of the most pleasant things about the New York stage is that we always have on it a number of beautiful and gifted young women. They are dancing in the musicals, or wearing pretty clothes, or acting and singing. One of them is playing the Queen of the Nile; another is singing a Shakespearean heroine; a third is a dancing Carmen and a fourth is kidding us when she says she is as corny as Kansas in August. One of the loveliest and most talented of all these lasses appeared at the Booth last evening in a comedy titled "The Velvet Glove."

She is Grace George, back on the stage after an absence of seven years. She made this first-nighter feel much younger than he is and much happier than his conscience should permit him to be. Miss George is a very special person in the theatre, with an enchanting voice and a captivating sense of civilized comedy. To the many who know this and to those who would like to learn it, I recommend Rosemary Casey's play, "The Velvet Glove."

Its Humor Is Decorous.

To others of less romantic nature than mine, I must address some cautious and perhaps discouraging details. Miss Casey's work is nice, and pleasant, and well staged by Guthrie McClintic, but slight as to story. Concerning itself with a convent, a mother-general, a bishop, a monsignor and others consecrated or devoted to the Catholic church, it is a play whose humor is decorous and whose good qualities may be appreciated more by those who are Catholics than by those who are not.

Miss George, in the beautiful habit of a religious order, plays the mother-general of a convent in northern New York. She and the convent are upset over charges brought against a young man, a lay teacher of history, that he is preaching Communist philosophy to the girls in his class. He is a nice young man—and an intelligent one. Miss George does not doubt his integrity, nor does any one else in the convent and its college, but the bishop of the diocese has made up his mind that the young man must be dismissed. Miss George outwits the bishop in the most gentle, motherly and superior fashion—hence the title of "The Velvet Glove."

Barbara Brady's Debut.

There were other reasons for pleasure last evening. One was the appearance of Walter Hampden as a genial old monsignor. Another was the debut of young Barbara Brady, Miss George's granddaughter, in the role of the ingenue. Miss Brady composed herself attractively as the girl who is in love with the young history teacher. Also pleasant and able was James Noble as the teacher, Jean Dixon was comically forceful as a nun, and John Williams did well as the bishop.

"The Velvet Glove" won the first annual prize of $5,000 offered by the Christophers as a comedy most likely to promote Christian ideals in American living. The setting, of Mother-General Hildebrand's office, is by Donald Oenslager.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 27, 1949

Miss George Is Charming In New Play

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Only Guthrie McClintic, of our theater, could have made such a lovely evening out of last night. "The Velvet Glove" is not a great play in anybody's register, but it is now touched by so much fine, fine workmanship that you listen to it and think it is completely lovable.

It is a story about a Catholic college, which is going to lose one of its best professors because he is accused of being a Communist. In the long run, the Mother Superior proves how much more important it is to think honestly and forwardly, than it is to be an opinionated old bootlicker, and one gets a rich lesson about a healthy kind of living.

Mr. McClintic, with the inestimable help of Miss Grace George, Miss Jean Dixon, Mr. John Williams, and several other good craftsmen, has turned out a lovely theater session.

To hear Miss George speak, is alone worth an evening's devotion. There is a young popular singer who is known as the Velvet Fog. Little does he know what that phrase really means.

Elegance and Grandeur.

Miss George not only fills the evening with exquisite sound, but she also keys it all with a kind of elegance and quiet grandeur that is terribly lost in this day. When she is on stage, time stops being frantic. She brings a quiet new dimension to the passing of time in the story.

Miss Dixon uses her well known dry comic manner with a hitherto unknown richness, as she portrays the forthright Sister who would love to rush things toward completion. Often she is funny in a manner that rings in your ears after her lines are long gone.

John Williams is testy and accumulatively difficult in the part of the Bishop who disapproves of the young Radical, and as the Professor himself, James Noble acts in the feeling of great good taste that Miss George and Miss Dixon set.

Speaking Is Superb.

Young Barbara Brady is most graceful as the devoted one of the professor, and Muriel Starr is excellent as a helpful Sister.

Walter Hampden, co-starred with Miss George, is expert, in fact royal, in his management of a well wishing Monsignor. When he and Miss George are speaking to each other, there is as excellent and audible a use of our language as many of us are likely to hear in our day again.

The play is literary and often seems wordy. Actually its verbiage is treated so well by the experts who have taken it over, that in a strange way it comes out a minor classic.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 27, 1949

By Otis L. Guernsey Jr.

Not a Very Good Fit

GRACE GEORGE'S seven-year absence from the Boardway theater came to an end last night as she appeared in an arch, sporadically amusing comedy about Roman Catholic nuns and priests involved in a controversy over politics in education. With Walter Hampden, she bore a mailed fist of righteous cunning through "The Velvet Glove" with poise and sincerity. But the verbal meanderings of this Christophers' Prize comedy by Rosemary Casey are often too thin, theatrically, for actors or for such an experienced manipulator as Guthrie McClintic. Whether dealing with people or world problems, the play is affectionate and has a veneer of charm, but it is not very stimulating.

* * *

For her reappearance, Miss George has chosen to play a Mother Superior trying to preserve the job of a young lay professor whose ideas are considered dangerous by the bishop. Under her obedient demeanor there is a canny knowledge of the ways of the world, and the script attempts to derive a gentle humor from the incongruity of the downcast eye and the clever chess move. Officers of the church and young people move about her, inducing in her and in themselves variations on the old joke about those in religious orders sometimes having worldly opinions and using wordly methods. As presented here, in a series of arguments, the joke is not lively enough to sustain three acts on the stage.

* * *

John Williams, as a bishop too readily influenced by a reactionary banker, and James Noble, as a young and forcefully opinionated professor, are the real antagonists of the piece, and it is typical of this play that they meet face-to-face in only one scene. Elsewhere the problem is merely talked about, and though McClintic fills his stage with the graceful, swishing motions of agitated nuns, he cannot give solidity to the airy words. Hampden does as much as can be done from a sitting position, playing a crippled, salty old Monsignor with a trace of an Irish accent and a mischevous smirk. He is a good fellow, as the mother superior is a clever woman, but they never get a firm grasp on the themes of political bigotry or educational freedom, either comically or dramatically, in this script.

* * *

Making her stage debut here is Barbara Brady, who is unfortunate in having some of the most difficult scenes to get over. She is in love with the embattled professor and distressed over his plight, and their little squabbles are the dullest bits of an uneven show. Jean Dixon and Naomi Riordan march in contrasting moods of piety about the single convent office set designed by Donald Oenslager. As a secular whimsy, "The Velvet Glove" is light and innocuous as eiderdown. Borne on the strong wind of a theatrical presentation, it is equally as elusive.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 27, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having won the Christophers' prize, Rosemary Casey's "The Velvet Glove" was put on at the Booth last evening, and Grace George and Walter Hampden are playing the leading parts in it. It is a mild, pleasant and thin little comedy about the skill with which a nun blackmails a Bishop by undermining his campaign to raise funds for a new seminary.

According to the terms of the Christophers' award, "The Velvet Glove" is the comedy "most likely to promote Christian ideals in American living." It is the story of Mother Hildebrand who by female guile forces Bishop Gregor to rescind his dismissal of a member of the college faculty.

The bishop has been persuaded that Professor Pearson is a dangerous teacher, perhaps a Communist. Although Mother Hildebrand and Sister Monica regard him as the most brilliant man on the faculty, the bishop orders his dismissal. He is dismissed. The affair appears to be irrevocable. But "The Velvet Glove" of the title refers to the subtlety with which Mother Hildebrand forces the bishop to retract. She attacks him through the pocketbook and he gives in.

This is not a notably exalted way of regulating justice in the church, and perhaps Miss Casey is suggesting that Bishops are not immune to material temptation. But she has Miss George on her side. Under Guthrie McClintic's silken direction Miss George gives another one of her matchless lightly accented performances as Mother Hildebrand. According to the office records, Miss George has not appeared on Broadway since 1943. This is a most becoming part for one of her gleaming, mischievous performances which have no visible weight, but wonderfully soft and lady-like authority.

* * *

As a matter of fact, the acting is delightful throughout. Walter Hampden, who gets mellower and more companionable through the years, acts a monsignor with grace, modesty and humor and makes a persuasive character out of an amiable part. John Williams is excellent as the bishop, his good manners admirably concealing a stuffy character. After a considerable absence from Broadway, Jean Dixon is back with a sharp, comic, economical performance as Sister Monica, which gives considerable strength to the whole play.

In the part of Mother Hildebrand's secretary, Barbara Brady gives a mettlesome and attractive performance. She is Miss George's granddaughter, and she is every inch the daughter of Katherine Alexander, whom she resembles in face, style and manner, which is not a bad idea at that. There is an agreeable performance of the correctly-insurgent professor by James Noble and a portly portrait of a good-hearted publisher by Ben Lackland.

* * *

Since Miss Casey's comedy is on the placid side, it needs dextrous acting and it also draws some color out of Donald Oenslager's beautiful setting. Miss Casey has a droll, well-bred sense of humor and a human sympathy for the politics of a well-run convent. But the affair of the bishop is not quite sturdy enough to sustain the play all evening, or nimble enough to tie up all the loose threads of the plot.

Nor is Miss Casey's solution original or satisfactory. Blackmailing a bishop through the pocket-book is no gayer than blackmailing the laity in the same place. Money solutions always beg the question when qualities of character are at stake. With all proper respect for the high-minded motives of the Christophers, "The Velvet Glove" is not likely to promote Christian ideals in American living, nor to damage them very much.